

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

I am Bill Harris. I represent House District 30. This district encompasses all of Petroleum and Garfield Counties, and a large part of Fergus and McCone Counties. Today I bring to you HB 144 [read] = An Act Authorizing the Use of Dogs While Hunting Black Bears.

Please note line 25 on page one under section 1 category 3 - A person may:
(b) hunt black bears during the appropriate open season with the aid of a dog or dogs as authorized by the commission. This bill is asking only that you grant the commission authority to implement the aid of dogs to hunt black bears only if and when they deem appropriate.

This situation could arise in the form of problem or dangerous bears that Fish Wildlife & Parks decides to remove. In the recent past they have contracted houndsmen to use hounds to locate and tree these bears to enable them to be removed.

In certain areas, where elk calve in heavy brush or timber, black bear sometimes feed heavily on young elk calves. This usually takes place in a small window of time, but could be reduced dramatically by a short season of hunting using hounds.

In many other states, hound hunting or baiting are considered acceptable methods of bear hunting. In Montana only stalking is accepted. Handicapped hunters, youth hunters, and older hunters are not very likely to be successful stalking a black bear. Most black bears in Montana are taken in the spring hunt when they first come out of hibernation. At this time they are wild, thin, and hungry. The cubs are very young and the bear's coats are ragged.

There are many reasons why FW&P commission might find it wise and even necessary for good management practices to include the use of dogs in black bear hunting. We are proposing only that you put this possible option in their tool box for their consideration in the future.